How to Prune Specific Plants

Pruning Trees & Shrubs

NC STATE EXTENSION

This final publication in the "Pruning Trees & Shrubs" series helps you customize your pruning for every plant in your yard.

The plants listed in Tables 1 through 8 are some of the most commonly used shrubs, trees, subshrubs, and vines of the Southeast. We have listed them alphabetically within the group that best describes their primary characteristics. The tables include each plant's function in the landscape, tips on what type of pruning the plant can tolerate, and the best time to prune it in the Southeast. In addition, we have included bloom times for flowering plants and indicated each plant's primary feature. To learn more about pruning, including techniques and tools, see the other publications in the Pruning Trees & Shrubs series:

- Before the Cut (AG-780-01)
- Tools to Make the Cut (AG-780-02)
- General Pruning Techniques (AG-780-03)

Important Terms

Know these before making the first cut!

deadheading—removing spent flowers from a plant to make it tidier, promote continued bloom production, or prevent fruit and seed production.

heading—a pruning cut that removes only a portion of a stem, often at an intermodal area (cut made between two buds or nodes). Used to create hedges and topiary (Figure 1).

rejuvenation (renovation)—involves removing oldest branches by pruning them near the ground. Rejuvenation can be done in stages or all at once, depending on pruning goals; plants should be fully established prior to rejuvenation.

Figure 1. Shearing can create beautiful topiary, such as these plants, with a bit of effort and yearly pruning.

*Figure 2. Wisteria trained as a small tree. It's best to use the native wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) rather than the nonnative species (shown here), which is quite invasive.*

removal cut—removing branches at the branch collar; typically done to open the canopy to air movement and increase light penetration.

Table 1. Deciduous Shrubs

Species	Bloom Time		Function	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type			
	Old Growth	New Growth		Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Berberis thunbergii, Japanese barberry		✓	H, SC, SB, W	IN	F				RM, H, R
Callicarpa sp., beautyberry		✓	H, SC, S, SB, W, F	IN	S–F–EW	R		RM	R
Calycanthus floridus, Carolina allspice	✓	✓	S, SB, F	SP–S	S–F–W	RM	RM, RD		
Chaenomeles sp., flowering quince	✓		SC, S, SB, E, ED, G	W–LW	S–F	RM, R3	RM, R3		
Clethra alnifolia, summersweet clethra		✓	SC, S, SB, RG, F	S	F–EW	RM, H, DH			RM, H, DH
Deutzia sp., deutzia	✓		SC, S, SB, F	S	NI	H, R			H, R
Edgeworthia papyrifera, edgeworthia	✓		S, SB	LW	IN	RM			RM, RD
Ficus carica, fig	✓	✓	S, E, ED	IN	S–F	RM, H			RM, RD, H
Forsythia ×intermedia, forsythia	✓		H, SC, SB	LW–SP	NI		R, RM, H		
Hamamelis sp., vernal witchhazel	✓		SC, S, SB, F	LW–SP	S–F	RM, RD	RM		
Hibiscus syriacus, rose–of–Sharon		✓	H, SC, S, E, F	S–F	F–W	RM, RD, R	H		RM, RD, R
Hydrangea arborescens, smooth hydrangea		✓	S, SB, F	S	NI	RM, RD, H,R	DH		RM, RD, R
Hydrangea macrophylla, bigleaf hydrangea	✓	✓	S, SB, F	SP–S	NI	H,DH	DH		
Hydrangea paniculata, panicle hydrangea		✓	S, SB, F	S	NI	RM,RD, H,R	DH		RM, RD, R
Hydrangea quercifolia, oakleaf hydrangea	✓		H, SC, S, SB, F	SP–S	NI	RM,RD,DH	RM, RD, DH		
Ilex verticillata, winterberry holly		✓	SC, S, SB, RG, W, F	IN	F–W–SP	RM			RM
Itea virginica, itea or sweetspire	✓		S, SB, RG, F	SP–S	S–F	RM,R	RM, R		
Jasminum nudiflorum, winter jasmine	✓		SC, SB, F	W–LW	NI	RM,H,R			
Kerria japonica, Japanese kerria	✓		H, SC, SB, F	SP	NI	RM,R			
Lagerstroemia indica, crape myrtle		✓	SC, S, SB, F	S	S–F	RM, RD, H		DH	RM, RD, H
Lonicera sp., shrub honeysuckle	✓	✓	H, SC, S, W, F	SP–S	S–F	RM, R			RM, R
Loropetalum chinese, loropetalum	✓	✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	SP, F	NI	RM, RD, H	RM, RD, H		RM, RD, H

(continued)

Table 1. Deciduous Shrubs (continued)

Species	Bloom Time		Function	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type			
	Old Growth	New Growth		Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Physocarpus opulifolius, ninebark	✓		SC, S, SB, W, F	SP–S	S–F	RM, R			
Rosa sp., landscape roses		✓	H, SC, S, SB, W, G, F	SP–F	F–W	R,RD	H, DH	H, DH, R	R
Spiraea ×bumalda, Bumald spirea	✓	✓	SC, S, SB, F	S–F	NI	RM, H,R	DH	DH	RM,H,R
Spiraea ×vanhouttei, Vanhoutte spirea	✓		H, SC, S, SB, F	SP	NI	RM, H,R			
Viburnum dentatum, arrowwood viburnum		✓	H, SC, S, SB, W, F	SP–S	S–F				RM, R
Viburnum macrocephalum, Chinese snowballbush viburnum	✓	✓	SC, S, SB, F	SP–F	NI	RM, RD, R			
Viburnum plicatum, doublefile viburnum		✓	SC, S, SB, F	S	NI				
Vitex agnus–castus, chaste tree		✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	S	F				H, RD, R

Function: H – Hedge, SC – Screen, S – Specimen, SB – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T – Topiary, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, RG – Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

Primary Feature and Timing: IN – Inconspicuous, EW – Early winter, LW – Late winter, W – Winter, SP – Spring, S – Summer, F – Fall, NI – Not important

Pruning Time and Type: RM – removal cut, RD – Reduction cut, H – Heading, R – Rejuvenation, R3 – Rejuvenate over three or more years, DH – Deadheading

Table 2. Broadleaved Evergreen Shrubs

Species	Bloom Time		Function	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type			
	Old Growth	New Growth		Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Abelia ×grandiflora, abelia	✓	✓	H, SC, SB, F	S–F	IN	R	RM, R		
Aucuba japonica, aucuba		✓	H, SC, SB, F	IN	F	RM, RD	R3		
Berberis julianae, wintergreen barberry	✓		H, SC, SB, W, F	LW–SP	S	RM, H			
Buxus sp., boxwood	NI		H, SC, SB, T, F	IN	IN	RM, H, R	H	H	R
Camellia japonica, Japanese camellia	✓		H, SC, S, SB, E, W, F	EW–SP	IN	RM, H, R3			
Camellia sasanqua, Sasanqua camellia	✓		H, SC, S, SB, E, W, F	F–EW	IN	RM, H, R3			
Elaeagnus sp., elaeagnus	✓		H, SC, SB, E, W, F	IN	S–F		RM, H	RM, H	
Fatsia japonica, fatsia		✓	S, SB, F	F	F–EW	RM, H, R3			
Gardenia jasminoides, gardenia		✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	S	S–F	RM, H, R3			RM, H, R3
Ilex sp., holly		✓	H, SC, S, SB, W, F	SP–S	F–W	RM, R	H		RM, R
Kalmia latifolia, mountain laurel	✓		S, SB, F	SP	NI	RM, R3	DH		
Ligustrum sp., privet		✓	H, SC, SB, T, E, F	SP–S	F–W	RM, R	H	H	RM, R
Mahonia sp., mahonia	✓		SC, S, SB, F	EW–SP	SP–S	RD, R3			
Myrica cerifera, wax myrtle	✓		H, SC, S, SB, W, F	SP	S–W	RM,RD, H	H		
Nandina domestica, nandina or heavenly bamboo		✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	S	F–W	RM,RD, H, R3			
Nerium oleander, oleander		✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	SP–S	F		RM, RD	RM, R3	
Osmanthus sp., osmanthus		✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	F–W	IN	RM, H	RM, RD, H		
Pieris japonica, Japanese pieris	✓		SC, S, SB, F	SP	IN	RM	DH		
Pittosporum sp., pittosporum	✓		H, SC, S, SB, F	SP	F	RM, H	RM, H		
Pyracantha sp., pyracantha	✓		H, SC, S, SB, E, W, F	SP	F–W	RM, RD	RM, RD, H		
Rhododendron catawbiense, Catawba rhododendron	✓		H, SC, SB, S, F, W	SP–S	NI	RM, H	H, DH		
Rhododendron sp., azaleas	✓	✓	H, SC, S, SB, F	SP	NI	RM, H, R, R3	RM, H, R, R3, DH		
Sarcococca sp., sarcococca	NI		H, S, SB, F	NI	NI	RM, R	RM		
Viburnum sp., evergreen or semi-evergreen viburnum	✓		H, SC, S, SB, W, F	SP–S	S–EW	RM, RD	RM, RD		

Function: H – Hedge, SC – Screen, S – Specimen, SB – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T – Topiary, E – Espalier, ED – Edible, RG –Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

Primary Feature: IN – Inconspicuous, EW – Early winter, LW – Late winter, W – Winter, SP – Spring, S – Summer, F –Fall, NI – Not important

Pruning Time and Type: RM – Removal cut, RD- Reduction cut, H – Heading, R – Rejuvenation, R3 – Rejuvenate over three or more years, DH – Deadheading

Table 3. Needled Evergreen Shrubs

Species	Function	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type			
		Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Chamaecyparis sp., false-cypress	SC, S, SB, W, F	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Removal, Reduction, Heading	Reduction, Heading	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction
Juniperus sp., junipers	H, SC, S, SB, W, G, F	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction
Thuja sp., arborvitae	H, SC, S, SB, W, F	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Thinning, Reduction	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction	Removal, Reduction

Function: H – Hedge, SC – Screen, S – Specimen, SB – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T –Topiary, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, RG –Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

Table 4. Deciduous Trees

Species	Function	Primary Feature			Pruning Time			
		Flower	Fruit	Color	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Acer sp., maples	SH, S, ST, W	Early Winter–Spring	Spring–Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amelanchier sp., serviceberry	S, ST, W, ED	Spring	Summer	Good		✓		
Betula nigra, river birch	SH, S, St, W, RG	Spring–Summer	Inconspicuous	Good–Fair	✓	✓	✓	
Carya illinoinensis, pecan	SH, S, W, ED	Inconspicuous	Fall	Good–Fair	✓		✓	✓
Cercis sp., redbud	S, ST, W, ED	Spring	Summer–Fall	Good	✓	✓		
Chionanthus sp., fringetree	S	Spring	Summer–Fall	Fair	✓	✓		
Cornus sp., dogwood	S, W, ED	Spring, Summer	Fall–Winter	Good	✓	✓		
Diospyros virginiana, persimmon	S, SH, W, ED	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Fair				✓
Ginkgo biloba, ginkgo	S, SH, ST, ED	Inconspicuous	Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Halesia carolina, Carolina silverbell	S	Spring–Summer	Fall	Fair		✓		
Koelreuteria paniculata, goldenrain tree	SH, S, ST	Summer	Summer–Fall	Fair–Bland	✓			✓
Liquidambar styraciflua, sweetgum	SH, ST	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Liriodendron tulipifera, tulip tree	SH, ST	Spring–Summer	Fall–Winter	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Magnolia sp., flowering magnolia	SH, S, RG	Spring, Summer, Fall	Summer–Fall	Bland		✓		
Malus sp., crabapple	S, W, E, ED	Spring–Summer	Fall–Winter	Fair–Bland	✓			
Prunus sp., flowering cherry	S, SH, W	Spring, Summer, Fall	Fall–Winter	Good–Fair	✓	✓		
Pyrus calleryana, Callery pear	S, SH, W	Spring	Fall–Winter	Good	✓	✓		✓
Quercus sp., oak	S, SH, ST, W, ED	Inconspicuous	Fall–Winter	Good–Bland	✓	✓	✓	✓
Styrax japonicus, Japanese snowbell tree	S	Spring	Fall	Fair	✓	✓		
Taxodium distichum, bald cypress	S, SH, ST, RG	Inconspicuous	Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ulmus parvifolia, Lacebark or Chinese elm	S, SH, ST	Inconspicuous	Summer–Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zelkova serrata, Japanese zelkova	S, SH, ST	Inconspicuous	Summer–Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓

Function: SH – Shade, S – Specimen, ST – Street tree, W – Wildlife, E – Espalier, ED – Edible, RG – Rain gardens

Table 5. Needled Evergreen Trees (The primary feature of these plants is their needle-like foliage.)

Species	Function	Primary Feature	Pruning Time			
			Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
×*Cuprocyparis leylandii*, Leyland cypress	H, W, SC	Year-round form and color	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cedrus deodara, deodar cedar	SH, S	Year-round form and color; interesting cones	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cupressus arizonica, Arizona cypress	SH, W, SC	Year-round form and color; interesting cones	✓	✓	✓	✓
Juniperus sp., juniper	S, W, H, SC	Year-round form and color	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pinus sp., pine	SH, S, W	Year-round form and color; interesting cones	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thuja sp., arborvitae	S, W, H, SC	Year-round form and color	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tsuga sp., hemlock	S, W, H, SC	Year-round form and color; interesting cones	✓	✓	✓	✓

Function: SH – Shade, S – Specimen, W – Wildlife, H – Hedge, SC – Screen, E – Espalier, and RG – Rain garden

Table 6. Broadleaved Evergreen Trees (These trees produce broad evergreen leaves that provide year-round interest in the landscape. They also have showy flowers and/or fruits in late spring or summer.)

Species	Function	Primary feature			Pruning Time			
		Flower	Fruit	Color	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Magnolia grandiflora, southern magnolia	SH, SC, E	Spring–Summer	Summer–Fall	Good		✓		
Magnolia virginiana, sweetbay magnolia	SC, RG	Spring–Summer	Summer–Fall	Fair		✓		
Photinia sp., photinia	H, S, SC	Spring–Summer	Summer–Fall	Good		✓		✓
Ternstroemia gymnanthera, Japanese ternstroemia or cleyera	H, S, SC	Inconspicuous	Summer–Fall	Good	✓	✓	✓	✓

Function: SH – Shade, S – Specimen, ST – Street tree, W – Wildlife, E – Espalier, ED – Edible, RG – Rain gardens

Table 7. Subshrubs. Woody older growth gives rise to herbaceous growth each year.

Species	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type		
	Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall
Buddleia davidii, butterflybush	Summer–Fall	Not important	R	DH	DH
Caryopteris clandonensis, blue mist spirea	Summer–Fall	Not important	H	DH	
Lavendula angustifolia, lavender	Spring–Summer	Not important	T	DH	T, DH
Perovskia atriplicifolia, Russian sage	Summer–Fall	Not important	H	H	
Rosmarinus officinalis, rosemary	Fall–Spring	Not important	T, RM	RM	

Pruning Time and Type: R – Rejuvenate, H – Head back to new growth, T – Tip back old flowers or growth, RM - Removal, and DH – Deadheading

Table 8. Vines

Species	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type		
	Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall
Bignonia capreolata, cross vine	Spring–Summer	Inconspicuous	H	H	
Clematis ×jackmanii, Jackman clematis	Spring	Inconspicuous	R		R
Clematis terniflora, sweetautumn clematis	Summer–Fall	Inconspicuous	R	T	R
Gelsemium sempervirens, Carolina jessamine	Spring, Fall	Inconspicuous	T	T	
Hydrangea anomala subsp. *petiolaris*, climbing hydrangea	Spring–Summer	Inconspicuous	RM, H	RM, H	
Jasminum officinale, common white jasmine	Spring–Summer	Inconspicuous	R (one-third)	T	
Trachelospermum jasmoinoides, Confederate jasmine	Spring–Summer	Inconspicuous	T		

Species	Primary Feature		Pruning Time and Type		
	Flower	Fruit	Spring	Summer	Fall
Wisteria sp., wisteria (Figure 2)	Spring	Fall		H	

Pruning Time and Type: R – Rejuvenate, H – Head back to new growth, T – Tip back old flowers or growth, RM – Removal, and DH – Deadheading

Arborvitae trimmed into cactus topiary.

All photos are courtesy of Associate Professor Barbara Fair.

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Authors:

Barbara Fair

Associate Professor, Landscape Extension Specialist & Certified Arborist

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